

April 11, 2016 Happy Birthday, Commander Shepard!

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Category: Mass Effect

Genre: Drama, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Garrus V., Miranda L., Shepard (M), Tali'Zorah

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-11 18:31:07

Updated: 2016-04-11 18:31:07

Packaged: 2016-04-27 19:48:19

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,066

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It's that time of year again! April 11 is Commander Shepard's birthday and my annual birthday story is posted. Please enjoy. It's not much this year.

April 11, 2016 Happy Birthday, Commander Shepard!

TITLE: Commander Shepard's Birthday 2016

CHAPTER: Complete

AN: I had no idea what to write about this year. So I just started writing. Cheers. Oh and, Happy Birthday Commander Shepard! Please check out my other Shepard birthday stories. Thanks for dropping by.

* * *

><p>On the edge of his hearing and annoyingly just out of sight a piano played a familiar tune. The problem is he cannot identify the location or the tune. The notes repeat and interfere with his ability to concentrate on the sounds of the engines or communications. The sound of murmuring voices also distracted him. There's laughter and music. He wished they would be quiet. Don't they understand this is a life or death situation? Don't they know how many lives are his responsibility? That he must be perfect in thought and deed. How every decision he makes affected their lives. As his frustration grew, he wondered about the exact moment he lost control of his life and his destiny.<p>

Joined the Alliance at eighteen just to get his mother off his back. Life in the military straightened him out, gave him purpose and direction. He excelled at everything the military taught him and damned if that hadn't surprised him. Until the day he swore in as an Alliance sailor he'd been just another rebellious street kid. Which was stupid, really because he lived in a graceful home overlooking

the bay in Vancouver surrounded by a servant, a nanny and a man who drove him to school everyday and made sure he finished his homework. His spacious bedroom overflowed with toys and the electronic gadgets he loved to tinker with. Everything a boy could want, except friends his own age, affection, understanding and loving parents. He didn't know anything about his father and his mother was in space so often, he'd almost forgotten her.

The boy grew up a loner and learned how to do without. Learned not to depend on anyone. How to hold back the tears no matter how deep the pain or how his lonely heart ached for love. He learned how to be tough and how to fight back. Figured out he was smarter than his classmates and how to use that intelligence to his advantage. All of which created a fiercely dedicated young man who allowed nothing and no one to distract him from his goals. After college, the handsome, brilliant young man entered the Alliance Navy and left any expectations of love, friendship or family behind in Vancouver.

Then one day he found a mentor. They needed an engineer to oversee the test flight of a new stealth ship. The brass picked Lieutenant John Shepard. The day he reported in, a man met him at the hatch. A tall man with dark skin, a friendly smile and the details of his life etched like a roadmap into the lines of his face. He waited while Shepard saluted the _ensign_ and saluted the man with the Captain's bars on his uniform.

"Permission to come aboard, sir."

"Permission granted, Lieutenant. Welcome aboard the Normandy." The captain returned his salute and shook his hand.

"She's beautiful, sir."

"That she is. Come on, we'll take a tour, then I'll show you to your quarters."

If it was unusual for the skipper of a ship to escort a low ranking officer to his quarters, Shepard kept it to himself. He followed the Captain through the new ship, her decks and consoles shiny and clean. Down a flight of stairs and they arrived in the ship's Galley. Shepard followed the captain to a small door on the left side of the spacious room. When the door slid open the young man could no longer remain quiet or hide his surprise.

"These are _my_ quarters, Captain?" His head turning back to the generous space, with a full size bed, desk and private latrine. "But, I'mâ€|"

That friendly smile appeared and John warmed to it. He couldn't remember anyone smiling at him that way. As if he were welcome here and not a stranger or just another low ranking officer.

The captain clapped him on the shoulder and chuckled. "I guess no one told you?"

"Told me what, sir?"

"We need your skills on this mission and I need a first officer. Don't look so skeptical. Do you think I can't read the ambition written between the lines of your service record? You've earned this,

Shepard."

John Shepard stared into the eyes of the Skipper and felt an unusual warmth blooming in his heart. He'd called him Shepard. Not Lieutenant or Lieutenant Shepard, just Shepard. As if they were friends. Captain Anderson squeezed his shoulder and gave him a push.

"Go on. Get settled in. Meet me in the CIC in two hours. I'll need to know who's checked in and a report on Ship's systems. We plan to launch at 0600, so there's plenty of work for everyone. Anyone gives you trouble, send them to me."

Shepard stepped inside his new quarters. "They won't, sir."

He's just twenty-nine years old.

A first officer's job is 24/7 and he took to the duties as if born to it. He's responsible for training, procurement, reports, evaluations, department head briefings and keeping the skipper up-to-date on everything. He led by example, his self confidence encouraged others to try harder, be stronger and push until it gives. Because he is so good at what he does, the crew begin a friendly competition among themselves. The only members of the crew who come close to his physical capabilities are the Marines.

The adventures of the Normandy's crew become legendary. Many races, especially the humans believe Commander John Shepard and his crew will keep them safe from every threat, including the rumors about something called Reapers. This is when the nightmares begin. John Shepard knew he's not superhuman, just as he knew the Normandy isn't capable of miracles. But he's the Captain of the Normandy now and Admiral Anderson looked to him to lead the way in keeping the galaxy safe.

Then it happened. On a perfectly normal duty day, Commander Shepard quite unexpectedly died. No one saw it coming. If they had, someone would certainly have ensured Shepard survived to fight another day. As the Normandy broke up, the crew raced for the escape pods. Everyone understood Shepard would make sure his crew was safe first. Then there he'd be, stepping out of an escape pod and reassuring them with his presence.

They knew it as well as they knew there were stars in the sky. Kaidan and Garrus organized them as they began to land and regroup. The injured crew were taken to the hospital. When everyone calmed down, checked on each other and speculated about what happened. And hadn't they seen Shepard leading Joker by the arm to a pod? Yes, almost everyone had seen that happening. In just a few moments, the pod containing Joker and the Skipper will touch down and everything will be alright.

Until, Garrus noticed Tali standing apart from the group staring up at the sky. He headed toward her and put his arm around her. He felt her body shaking when she leaned into him. They one by one, Commander Shepard's crew joined them and they waited.

As he tried to reconnect the oxygen hose to his suit and his body spins out of control in free fall toward Alachera he thought of the people in his life and the work he must now leave to others. New friends, like Tali, Garrus, Liara and Grunt. The original members of

his crew who had always been there, except now, they were friends. Like the family he never had. His navigator, Joker who kept him grounded with humor and unfailing loyalty. Kaidan who told him stories and listened to his concerns. The silvery beauty of the unflappable Doctor Chakwas who took care of his crew.

His final thoughts were of the Normandy. She is still beautiful against the stars, burning with color of a thousand fires as her final death throes shake her apart. With his last breath he wept. For the work he left undone, for disappointing Anderson, and the loss of his new family. The tears froze on his cheeks and mixed with the frost forming over his skin. He can no longer see her, or his lungs fill with air. Against his blind eyes she exploded with the light of a sun, into hundreds of thousands of pieces. She'll travel through space for all eternity, much of her melted down into basic molecules.

Shepard closed his eyes and died with her.

This was death? Not quite what he expected. Perhaps he was in hell? No, he never believed in hell or heaven. Both were what you made of your own life, by your deeds and your words. Hell had been watching his ship explode. Heaven, and the only reality he can pin his intellect on, is a brunette with blue eyes and an accent he can't place. She's always there when he finally found his way out of the dark forest nightmares.

Occasionally, she talks about him to other people. But she never speaks directly to him. He wishes she would because he wanted to ask her name. Except he can't talk, or move. He's not really sure he's breathing and he can't hear the sound of his own heartbeat.

Please talk to me. _

But she never did and the nightmares always returned. People he knew stood just out of his reach in the forest. When he ran to them, they disappeared in a shimmer of familiar colors of purple, blue, red and black. They spoke in languages he didn't understand. The parts he did recognize, he hung on to like a pieces of bread on a trail through the forest.

Blue is Garrus, his friend and mentor. The steady cerulean blue eyes, blinking in understanding, standing close to lend support. Finding their way to friendship through the expectations and bias of their cultures.

Stormy brown eyes set in a handsome face. The haunted young man loved to talk...needed to talk as if it were the only way to release the demons of his childhood. Shepard listened to the haunted young marine because he knew those demons. The night they'd gotten drunk in his quarters the day Ashley died. Kaidan wept at the loss and Shepard kept their glasses full. He might have cried too, but he had to hang on to the idea that it was his decision and his burden, therefore crying was unnecessary.

Late that night Garrus found him in Engineering, with an empty bottle of scotch in his hands. Liara came running at his call. She knew what to do. Garrus watched her slide herself into Shepard's arms and embrace him, while Garrus stood guard at the hatch. She held the human until he stopped shaking. They both walked him to his quarters

and made sure he got into bed. Then they took turns watching over him during the long night.

Purple is Tali. Purple is cheerful and brave. Young and brilliant. Tali can do anything with mechanical devices. No computer could stand up to her hacking skills. She's amazing and if he feels love for her, he scolds himself into believing she's like a little sister to him.

Troubled brown eyes in a beautiful face. A woman who worked for a one of the most notorious organizations ever know, yet she watched out for her sister and fought against her father. Jeff Moreau, who flies his beautiful ship, drives him crazy with his stupid jokes and keeps them out of harm's way.

The colors call to him, but the forest will not yield its secrets. He can only move forward, follow orders, and keep the peace. In between, in those moments where he can stop and talk to his crew. They give him what he won't acknowledge lies aching in his heart. They heal him and he falls in love—he can no longer help himself—with all of them because they are brave enough to share their hearts with him.

And always, the troubled brown eyes of the woman who rebuilt him. The woman who saved his life. His Pygmalion, his own private Doctor Frankenstein. Only, she is anything but that, she's beautiful and desirable and brilliant. Although, there's one thing he doesn't understand. If she's uncomfortable with the way her father shaped her appearance, why does she continue to dress in that outfit?

Not that he minded, but he prides himself on seeing past her physical attributes into the driven young woman who saved his life and now fought at his side. And somehow, in this dream he can't escape, he knew the taste of her. The touch of her hands on his naked body and the sweet words she whispered to him in the night. With her, he doesn't have to be perfect and she understood. Sometimes, it's enough that she is finally talking to him. Her voice calmed him. He'd waited such a long time.

The nightmares changed and he's lost and alone on the streets of London. Where are they? Where is his crew? He ran through fire, dodging the slash of red lasers calling out to them. A noise so deafening it knocked him to his knees each time it echoed down the streets. The enemy is everywhere and there is no front line. They cannot hope to win this and yet they must keep moving. What else can they do? They follow him, just as they always have and he carried a grief which knows no end because he's leading them to their death.

He's in a waking nightmare of the familiar burned out forest. He cannot find his crew, their screams come from the walls of flames and he cannot breach the fire. Then his eyes open and he sees not the dark canopy of the endless forest, but one of his crew sitting with him. Where is he and why won't they won't they speak to him. Is he dead or alive? Is Earth safe?

He dreams of waking up in the Cerberus Facility. Running dazed and frustrated at this lack of control through the corridors. Chasing a child with blue eyes and black hair. Each time he woke up he saw a different member of his crew. This time they don't disappear. Flowers

sit in their vases all around him. It's better than the fire and quieter. Garrus! There's Garrus' blue eyes. Tali's purple mask. Joker's cap on his bedside table. James left a gift on the table next to his bed. Why a gift? He wanted desperately to ask, but he sees the shine of tears in James's eyes and he can't make himself interrupt.

The dream changed and Miranda became the one constant. She knew him and he trusted her. Memories of her talking to him begin to surface. She became his touchstone in a world gone mad. The Council won't listen to him and he has to waste time running "favor" missions just to gain support. She's always there for him as a soundboard and an ear.

"I like to know where I fit in the world." _Me too,_ Shepard agreed.

He woke again to the darkness of his room. This time he's able to identify the unmistakable scent of a hospital. Tubes poke and prod into almost every orifice of his body. Miranda's mysterious blue eyes. The hands and fingers he remembered moving over his body. She sat by his bed, showing no signs of disappearing. Her hair is longer, tied in a braid and brought forward over her shoulder. She's dressed in a simple jumpsuit of black and red.

How much time past? What happened? Is Earth safe? Where is his crew?

Morning sent a ray of light through the window to awaken him. Many of the tubes are gone now. When had that happened? The hospital smells, the warmth of the sun on his skin, the sight of Miranda sitting across the small room, holding something in her arms. Shepard blinked to focus on the small bundle. The beautiful woman opened her shirt and tossed a small blanket over her shoulder for modesty. For modesty? He remembered that about her, always dressed provocatively, and ignoring its meaning, but wild in his arms when he made love to her.

She pulled the blanket away exposing the face of a child, an infant. It's small face screwed up with frustration until Miranda offered her breast to the infant. The lines smoothed out and Shepard noticed the cap of fuzzy black hair and Miranda's eyes. The infant glanced his direction and smiled with a drop of milk spilling over his round cheek. Shepard swallowed hard against a dry throat when the connection to his heart completed the circuit with the woman and child across the room.

Different from the Miranda he knew. Her face is calm, her movements unhurried and gentle. Miranda made a small adjustment to the child's position and looked up at him. He waited so long for her to talk to him. Her smile lit up the room and he smiled back. There's so much he needs to say to her and so many questions to ask.

For now, he feels grateful for the strength just to say her name.

"Miranda?"

"Shepard. You're awake."

Her beautiful brown eyes filled with tears. There's something different about her a softness that wasn't there before. Almost vulnerable, dressed in soft clothes and holding the baby close to her heart."

"What do you have there?"

"This is your son, Shepard."

The baby continued to stare at him and then he's closer and Miranda lays him down next to his father. Her scent envelopes him when she kisses his cheek. "Happy birthday. I thought we might name him David."

End
file.